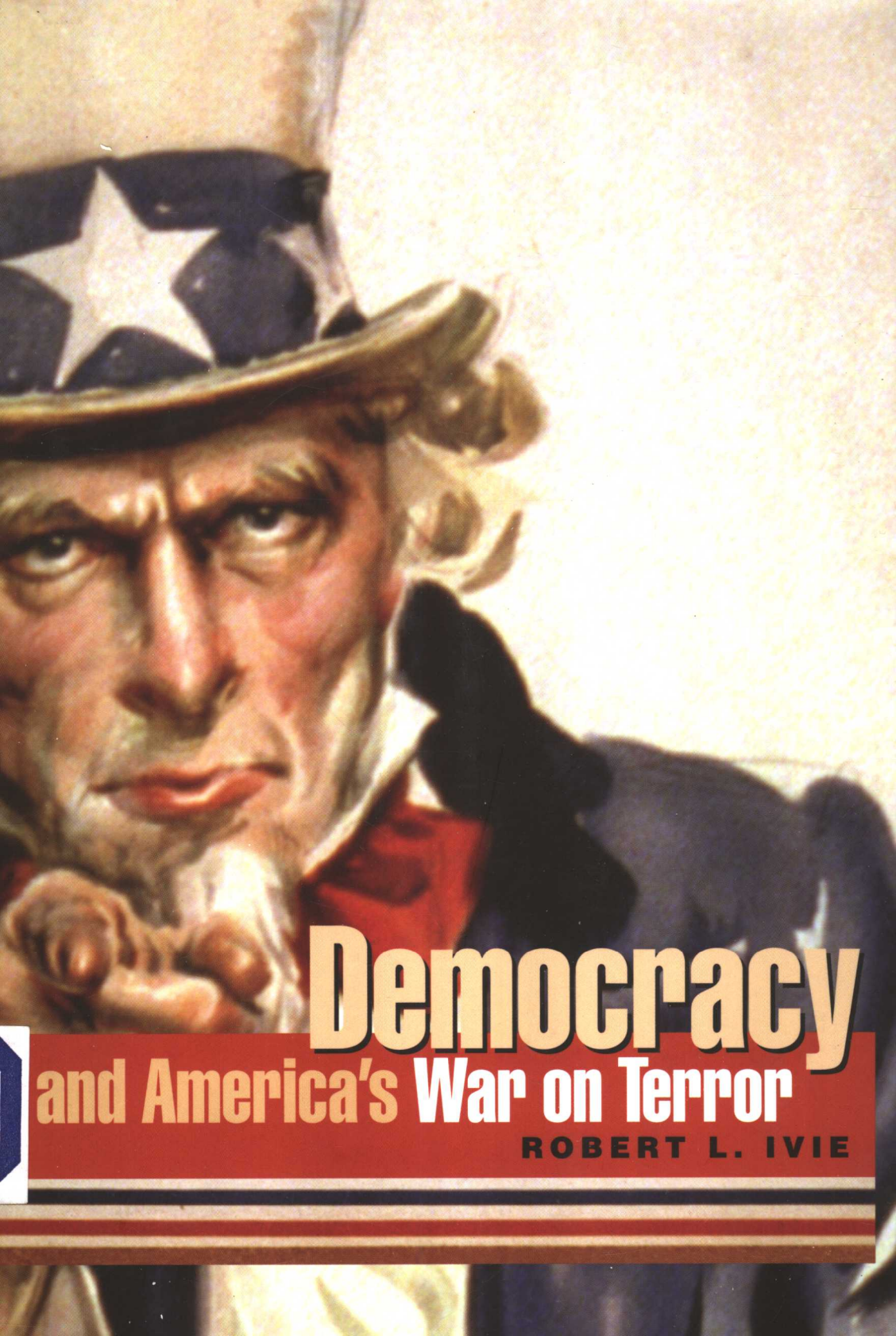

Democracy and America's War on Terror

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Preface and Acknowledgments

I have been writing for more than three decades about American war rhetoric, a project that has evolved over time to the present critique of the war on terror. My early investigations of war as a genre of political discourse brought me quickly to a focus on the image of the enemy, which is central to any call to arms, to Kenneth Burke's theory of vilification and victimization, and now to George W. Bush's rhetoric of evil. Over the last number of years I have become increasingly alert to the centrality of democracy in all of this, how critical its various constructions have been to the national identity and motives for war and how its potential for building a positive peace in our time has yet to be realized. In the aftermath of 9/11, I felt a renewed urgency to address the problem and potential of democracy in a troubled and deeply conflicted world. Not since the traumatic experience of the Vietnam War, which launched my ongoing quest to understand how the United States talks itself into such wars, had I felt so strongly compelled to seek answers to the question of how we might talk ourselves out of an unnecessarily belligerent attitude. The answer I advance here is to reassess America's traditional distrust of democracy and to redeploy democracy robustly as a rhetorical idiom of engaging even nondemocratic Others through strategies of identification that partially bridge the human divide in order to articulate relationships of consubstantial rivalry. This is but a partial answer to the complexities of war and peace, but it drives toward the heart of the matter and, I hope, will stimulate further inquiries of its kind.

I have been working on the ideas specifically related to this book during the last decade, and some of these ideas have appeared in earlier versions elsewhere. Some of chapter 1 draws on my essay "Democratic Deliberation in

a Rhetorical Republic," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 84 (1998): 491–505. Portions of chapters 1 and 3 are drawn from parts of my chapter titled "A New Democratic World Order?" in *Critical Reflections on the Cold War: Linking Rhetoric and History*, ed. Martin J. Medhurst and H. W. Brands (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), 247–65. Some of chapter 2 is condensed in my chapter titled "Distempered Demos: Myth, Metaphor, and U.S. Political Culture," in *Myth: A New Symposium*, ed. Gregory Schrempp and William Hansen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 165–79. Chapter 3 draws from my essay "Democratizing for Peace," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 4 (2001): 309–22. A segment of chapter 5 comes from my essay "Evil Enemy v. Agonistic Other: Rhetorical Constructions of Terrorism," *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 25 (2003): 181–200. Bits and pieces of other themes dispersed throughout this book can be found in other recent essays I have published, including "Democracy, War, and Decivilizing Metaphors of American Insecurity," in *Metaphorical World Politics: Rhetorics of Democracy, War, and Globalization*, ed. Francis A. Beer and Christ'l de Landtsheer (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004) and "Rhetorical Deliberation and Democratic Politics in the Here and Now," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 5 (Spring 2002): 277–85. This previously published material has been reworked and integrated with the bulk of the new writing that constitutes the present book and its original argument.

I am grateful for the opportunities provided to me to develop and test in various lectures and venues my thinking on the problem of the terror war. These presentations included a talk titled "Profiling Terrorism" as the Wayne N. Thompson Annual Lecture at Western Illinois University, March 25, 2002. It was also delivered as the keynote speech during "Communication Week" at Indiana University, Northwest, in Gary on March 26, 2002. Another talk, "Terrorism at Democracy's Frontier," was presented at Manchester College in Manchester, Indiana, during "Peace Week," April 17, 2002. I presented "Terrorism on Democracy's Rhetorical Frontier" in a plenary session of the Eighth Biennial Public Address Conference, October 4, 2002, held at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia. On a keynote panel at the Eighty-eighth Annual Convention of the National Communication Association, held on November 22, 2002, in New Orleans, I presented a paper on the theme "Profiling Terrorism: From Freedom's Evil Enemy to Democracy's Agonistic Other." My keynote presentation for an interdisciplinary and international conference on war, law, and rhetoric, sponsored by the Center for the Study of European Civilization, was presented at the University of Ber-

gen in Norway on March 12, 2003, and was titled "Evil Enemy v. Agonistic Other: Rhetorical Constructions of Terrorism." A version of that talk was also given on a spotlight program, dedicated to critiquing the rhetoric of war, at the Eighty-fourth Annual Meeting of the Eastern Communication Association, April 25, 2003, in Washington, D.C. Finally, I spoke to the faculty and students of Alma College in Alma, Michigan, on May 13, 2003, on the subject "The Rhetoric of Evil and the Idiom of Democracy in the War on Terrorism."

My debt of gratitude extends to three of my closest friends and most engaging colleagues who, over the years, encouraged me in this work both by reassuring me it was worth the effort and by challenging me to explore new avenues of thought. Oscar Giner opened my eyes to the performative power of myth in human relations generally and in political affairs specifically, which led me to a compelling appreciation for the life-sustaining dirt work performed by Coyote and other trickster figures. John Lucaites affirmed my inclinations toward a productive mode of rhetorical critique, engaging me conceptually throughout the extended process of developing the argument of this book despite the daily distraction of departmental administration that kept us both otherwise occupied for ten years. Jeffrey Isaac engaged my developing notions of democracy agonistically, providing not only an enrichment of those notions but also a living example of productive agonistics. Each of these brilliant colleagues has enriched my work and my life. I have benefited immensely from their friendship and from their reactions to the manuscript. Its remaining limitations reveal my own shortcomings, not theirs.

The continuing inspiration for this work comes from the love and support I have received from my wife, Nancy Lee Ivie, these past thirty-seven years. She has been my compass through the maze of adulthood and my coconspirator in selectively subverting outworn habits of the life world. She has taught me to learn from our grown children, each of whom has set out in directions both recognizable and unique. And she has inspired me by her own example to cherish the gifts of our parents. In particular, I wish to honor the memory of my father, Robert G. Ivie, who served his country faithfully and courageously as a commissioned officer in two of America's wars. He fought to preserve the principles we are now challenged to put into practice with renewed commitment and vigor.

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Introduction

September 11, 2001, was a second day of infamy for Americans, or so it seemed, in which terror was visited upon a peaceful and unsuspecting people by the dastardly forces of tyranny. The United States was at war once again, more or less, with an axis of evil in defense of freedom and democracy. Sixty years earlier, Franklin Roosevelt's heroic oratory following Japan's sneak attack on Pearl Harbor had rallied the nation not only to defeat the agents of treachery and their wicked coconspirators but also to crusade for an end to the history of war by establishing an empire of democracy. From that moment of moral outrage to the present day of righteous fervor, America's quest for invulnerability and a democratic peace has placed the nation under "the shadow of war," to borrow Michael Sherry's felicitous phrase, its culture and institutions militarized, its foreign affairs intensified, and its passion for absolute security thwarted.[1] Thus, a cyclical drama of transgression, travail, and triumph has traumatized the nation from the beginning of the American century. Under the sign of great tragedy and in the image of heroic struggle, a beleaguered nation once again has been called upon by its president to defeat the horror of chaos and to secure the future of civilization, this time against the specter of global terrorism.[2]

The intersection of terror, democracy, and war is both strange and familiar territory for Americans to tread and conquer. They have defeated the threat of tyranny before, only to encounter it again in yet another virulent form. Danger is seemingly endemic to a demos—a democratic people and their leaders—forever besieged by demons from within as well as outside their polity. Thus, *democracy* is a troublesome term in the lexicon of American political culture. As a mark of national identity, it inspires greatness and sug-

gests destiny but also stirs dread and loathing, fear and distrust, terror and counterterror. It is at once a powerful incentive for peace and a compelling motive for war, a reservoir of strength and a point of vulnerability, a dimension of the nation's awesome might and a source of its chronic insecurities. Democracy, in short, is a decidedly conflicted measure of American power or the failure thereof.

Joseph Nye makes an important observation about the role of America's democratic "soft power" in meeting the challenges of our time at home and abroad. As a mode of enticement and attraction, unlike military force and economic coercion, soft power shapes preferences to inspire imitation and sets political agendas to achieve consent. This kind of influence is derived from the way the nation expresses its cultural values and handles its domestic and foreign affairs by championing democracy, promoting peace, and cooperating with international institutions. In the global information age, the United States cannot afford to undermine its soft power without eroding its standing and security in the world. International cooperation is required to assure continuing economic vitality, for example, and to address global problems such as terrorism effectively.

Nevertheless, a parochial spirit of arrogant and heavy-handed unilateralism has emerged at this critical moment, especially after the events of 9/11, to define U.S. interests narrowly with indifference to the opinions of others and renewed devotion to the exercise of hard power. The hubris of this new unilateralism has motivated the United States to violate civil liberties, reduce foreign aid, eschew international treaties and conventions, and snub the United Nations just when "world politics is changing in a way that means Americans cannot achieve all their international goals acting alone" and will likely get themselves deeply into trouble if they alienate other nations by "investing in military power alone" while squandering the soft power of democratic values.[3]

The paradox of American military and economic power, as Nye observes, is that the United States is too strong to be challenged by any other single state but not strong enough to solve global problems, such as terrorism, by itself. America's security requires the help and respect of others. Accordingly, the exercise of soft power to enhance U.S. security necessitates a willingness to cooperate with other states and international organizations and thus to accept a reduced measure of direct control over world affairs. In Nye's words, "We may have less control in the future, but we may find ourselves living in a world somewhat more congenial to our basic values of democracy, free mar-

kets, and human rights." Hard power as the measure of American preeminence will prove increasingly illusionary in an information age of intense diversity and thick globalization that is changing the very meaning of control. "Fewer issues that we care about," Nye continues, "will prove susceptible to solution through our dominant military power."[4]

The irony of this paradox of power is that the United States must relinquish a degree of control in order to enhance its security. Yet, the irony itself is premised on an illusion of control, as if the United States can will its security unilaterally through military preeminence and economic hegemony. Americans cannot surrender a commanding global influence that is beyond their reach even as the world's sole superpower. They can only forfeit the illusion of control and place greater faith in the soft power of their democratic culture. That is the challenge facing an insecure nation at the peak of its power: will it entrust its future to strengthening democratic practices in the present or bet against the odds by trying to dominate the world?

Affirming the soft power of democracy does not imply abandoning the hard power of military and economic strength, nor does it mean treating democracy as an excuse for world domination or as a pretext for perpetual war in a quixotic (or even cynical) quest for universal peace. The point is that the United States cannot rely solely on hard power to ensure its welfare, nor can it sustain an arrogant and alienating unilateralism that undermines its democratic credentials by attempting to force its will on a world in which power is increasingly complex and widely distributed, a world requiring better cooperation and greater capacity to cope with diversity. Enriching the nation's democratic culture is key to enhancing its well-being and security.

Yet, democracy itself, as a troubled term in the lexicon of American political culture, is a source of chronic fear and national insecurity no less than a resource of domestic health and global influence. Tapping its full potential for adapting to the shifting challenges of a divisive and decentralized global order will require adjusting a severely conflicted attitude, which consists of a strong positive regard for the promise of democratic rule that, in turn, is diminished by a deep and abiding apprehension over the threat of democratic distemper. The purpose of this book is to confront that very tension between democracy's perceived promise and peril. My argument is that contemporary threats and challenges facing the United States can be addressed more constructively in a robustly democratic idiom than by perpetuating the debilitating image of distempered democracy, that the nation's well-being, standing, and security can be enhanced by giving primacy to democratic practices and

values instead of degraded by surrendering to the antagonistic impulses and aggressive policies emanating from a republic of fear, and that enriching democratic practice promotes a positive peace over giving the presumption to war.

In order to develop a constructive critique of America's democratic deficit, I have adopted an overtly rhetorical perspective both for identifying the distinctly discursive dimension of the problem at hand and for advancing a corresponding corrective of enriching democratic culture and practice. From that perspective, I presume polities cannot choose between rhetoric and reality but instead must opt for more or less adequate interpretations of their multifaceted worlds, interpretations which necessarily are constructed rhetorically. Our choices are always between one kind of rhetoric and another.

Symbolic action is inherent to the human condition. As symbol-using and symbol-misusing beings, we make sense of things and develop strategies of adaptation, both individually and collectively, through language. Discourse constructs and reconstructs political realities as we know them within frameworks of interpretation. In Kenneth Burke's view, "Much that we take as observations about 'reality' may be but the spinning out of possibilities implicit in our particular choice of terms."[5] Such is the rhetorical fabric of political motivation understood as collective attitudes or predispositions toward action of one sort or another.

The more flexible these discursive constructions, or what Burke has called "terministic screens," the better they serve as "equipment for living," that is, as interpretive instruments for coping with the stresses and strains of a dynamic and complex world—a shrinking world in which social divisions, cultural diversity, and other sources of difference are increasingly compressed in the global information age to the point of intensifying friction and igniting conflict. The more rigidly these "terministic incentives" are constructed, the more likely they are to exacerbate tension, foster alienation and hatred, and provoke violence. Thus, the central function of language, considered as symbolic action, is "attitudinal and hortatory," an instrument of political "cooperation and competition." Pushed to the extreme, it yields untoward consequences, including guilt, hatred, fear, and "catharsis by scapegoat."[6]

Accordingly, a considerable source of America's chronically exaggerated fear of foreign and even domestic Others, its disinclination toward international cooperation, its propensity for unilateralism, and its motivation for war can be attributed to the rhetorically rigid construction of a term central to the national identity. As that term, democracy is all too readily degraded into

an object of anxiety and containment, especially when it is closely articulated with the language of disease and with other reified tropes of endangerment. Under this condition of rhetorical degradation, the thoroughly literalized and elaborated metaphor of distempered democracy manifests and reproduces a troublesome state of mind that, at its worst, reduces a powerful nation to an aggressive republic of fear. As such, the United States is strongly predisposed toward violence and deeply motivated to rationalize war as the work of peace.

Managing this fear-induced tension within the nation's democratic identity, where an otherwise abiding aspiration for peace conflicts with an immediate incitement to war, requires constant rhetorical work to keep from destabilizing the prevailing but problematic rationale for relying so heavily on America's righteous force to pursue an illusive state of security. Absent a strong accent on a flexible and robust conception of democratic practice, a rigid rhetoric of evil, such as that practiced by George W. Bush, stirs the nation into patriotic fits of belligerence. This is a rhetoric that promotes the mistaken promise of a universal peace in a mythical world made safe for democracy and that inhibits any serious reconfiguration of democracy itself into a figure of strength rather than a sign of danger. It is a rhetoric too little contested at the present moment of growing national hubris and diminishing tolerance in a decidedly conflicted and complex world. Thus, it is a rhetoric that requires critique in order to redirect its force toward an attitude more conducive to coping with the challenges of the global information age.

The critique advanced throughout the pages of this book probes four interconnected points of tension in the problematic composition of democracy as a terministic incentive for war. One of those points is a restrictive conception of democratic deliberation that reflects and reinforces what might be called the nation's inclination toward demophobia. This idealization of deliberative democracy as a rational process best reserved for experts and privileged political leaders, a process easily degraded by the common people under the irrational influence of a demagogue, is elitist, culturally biased, and generally tone deaf to the challenges of pluralism and diversity. It is a discourse of rationality that masks its own rhetorical form and function and thereby impoverishes democratic culture, whereas a more rhetorically robust mode of political reasoning enriches public deliberation and democratic identity in a way that is responsive to a pluralistic polity and reduces exaggerated fears of foreign and domestic Others.

A second and related point of tension constituting a republic of fear re-

sides in the irony of distrusting the very symbol of the nation's identity and purpose. This tension between democracy's legitimizing ethos and its unruly impulses is managed by invoking the myth of disease to fabricate the image of a distempered demos. The vehicles of the myth convey a caricature of the public as prone to popular rage and fits of passion, convulsions of factionalism that poison public deliberations, and a contagion of jealousy and avarice that reduces the people to a collection of mere dupes subject to the manipulation of unsavory politicians. Thus the founders fashioned a republic, grounded on the fiction of representation, that contained rather than entrusted itself to the rule of the people. Representation was the healing principle that removed the disease of the people from the body politic. It privileged supposedly rational elites over a presumably distempered mass on the premise that the public is vulnerable to unenlightened and debilitating influences, thereby predisposing the republic to discipline domestic differences and prevent foreign contamination.

A third affiliated point of tension locates democracy at the intersection of war and peace. Consistent with the fear of foreign contamination and a determination to control domestic distemper, the quest to achieve a universal peace is motivated by a desire to expand the domain of liberal democracy in order to contain the forces of disorder and curtail chaos within an ever-diminishing perimeter. The truism that democracies do not fight one another has become a commonplace of scholarship and public discourse alike and the centerpiece of a national security policy driven by the attitude that democracy is too frail to survive alien influences. The very pursuit of a perfect peace through global democratization belies an abiding uncertainty and deep suspicion of democracy that, in turn, provides an enduring and powerful incentive for war, so much so that Americans typically do not even notice the oxymoronic conceit of fighting for a democratic peace.

This festering conundrum of pacific belligerence extends to a fourth point of tension in the republic of fear. America's democratic appetite for war and corresponding inclination toward a politics of quiescence and coercion were intensified by the tragic events of 9/11, which spurred the nation to declare an open-ended war on international terrorism. As that vague but invasive state of hostilities expanded to various foreign and domestic fronts, it brought with it an evolving presumption of preemptive and perpetual war. A nation of reluctant belligerents who historically proclaimed themselves predisposed to peace no longer placed the principal burden of proof on those who advocated for war. The United States, it was now broadly presumed, was merely

engaging in one battle after another in a seamless war on terrorism when it invaded Iraq, for example, not committing acts of aggression. Preemptive wars and curtailments of civil liberties were merely tactical requirements in an overall strategy to defeat terrorists who had initiated hostilities with their unprovoked attack on the twin towers of Manhattan and the Pentagon.

The administration's rigid and simplistic rhetoric of evil profiled the enemy crudely but powerfully in a manner that entangled the United States even more dreadfully in a theater of reciprocal and escalating violence perpetrated against civilians for political purposes and proving once again the gruesome validity of Nietzsche's observation that "every society has the tendency to reduce its opponents to caricatures": "'The good man' sees himself as if surrounded by evil, and under the continual onslaught of evil his eye grows keener, he discovers evil in all his dreams and desires; and so he ends, quite reasonably, by considering nature evil, mankind corrupt, goodness an act of grace (that is, as impossible for man). *In summa:* he denies life, he grasps that when good is the supreme value it condemns life."[7] Reciprocal demonizing spurred each side to participate in an escalating dance of death. By this logic, Americans were expected to fight for the hollowed-out symbols of freedom and democracy while succumbing to the righteous, even crusading, will of the administration and disregarding the underlying causes of terrorism.

Democracy was contained, diminished, deferred, and sacrificed on the altar of righteous force and in the quest to achieve national security by eradicating an ubiquitous evil Other. Democracy itself was thought to be too dangerous to practice safely and robustly during this open-ended war on terrorism if the nation was to stay the course and eventually prevail. Patriotic fervor and political quiescence were the preferred alternatives to debate and dissent. The perceived risk of, and threat to, exercising freedom and practicing democracy contributed doubly to the nation's sense of extreme peril.

Yet the rhetorical work required to suppress the twin impulses of freedom and democracy under the sign of danger generated tensions of its own inside a political culture that possesses a residual respect for and enduring devotion to democratic practices and principles. Herein lay an untapped rhetorical resource for displacing the language of evil and recovering the presumption of peace by giving primacy to a balance of liberal-democratic values and speaking in a robust democratic idiom rather than in a weak and demophobic voice. Addressing agonistic Others strategically as consubstantial rivals rather than as evil enemies reduces the impulse to exaggerate danger, invent scapegoats, and rely too singularly or heavily on the hard power of military coer-

cion. It requires exercising rhetorical flexibility over ideological rigidity, keeping linguistic boundaries appropriately fluid and fuzzy within a prevailing framework of interpretation and motivation, finding points of identification that make adversaries concurrently adverse and consubstantial, identifying similarities where otherwise only differences prevail and underscoring differences where similarities have been reduced to simplistic identities. Speaking in the idiom of robust democracy is not a luxury to be reserved for addressing friends and allies but instead a necessity for keeping rivals from becoming sheer enemies. To the degree that war in a republic of fear is the bitter fruit of rhetorical rigidity, peace may regain some standing by bolstering democratic culture and speaking across rhetorically blurred boundaries out of respect for the complexities of an increasingly interconnected and deeply divided world. Such is the constructive role of rhetoric in advancing a positive conception of peace for a healthy democratic society, a rhetoric that resists the kind of extreme Othering that perpetuates the cycle of terror and counterterror.

This is the basic outline of the argument that the rest of the book develops into a more detailed critique. The four interrelated points of tension associated with an elitist conception of democratic deliberation, a debilitating identification of democracy with disease, an oxymoronic conceit of fighting for a democratic peace, and a counterproductive rhetoric of evil for protecting freedom and democracy from terrorism converge not only on a diagnosis of discursive sources of national insecurity and associated rationalizations of state violence but also a prescription for enriching democratic culture and decreasing aggressive unilateralism. The diagnosis points to how America's fear of its own demos is transformed into exaggerated articulations of vulnerability and extreme danger from exposure to alien influence. The prescription, like the problem itself, is a rhetorical derivative, but instead of projecting reified metaphors of disease onto foreign Others and treating them as sheer enemies and convenient scapegoats, it calls for articulating points of intersection between rivals to make them partially consubstantial with one another and to give primacy to liberal-democratic values in the management of serious differences. Democracy, like rhetoric, participates in the drama of life that pits protagonists against antagonists who may or may not choose to reduce one another to tragic enemies and, in the first case, learn the lesson of hubris the hard way by fighting one another to the bitter death or, alternatively, discover they are better off competing cooperatively across appropriately fluid and fuzzy lines of division.

I do not mean to suggest that I have identified the whole problem of American insecurity and belligerence or provided a complete solution. Instead, my aim is to call attention to an overlooked but important rhetorical dimension of public culture that can either hinder or help our efforts to live as peacefully and productively as possible in a deeply conflicted, richly diverse, and increasingly compressed global village. We are not yet accustomed to thinking of rhetoric as a potentially positive force for achieving a healthy democratic culture, but we live in a divisive world that requires us to look constantly for strategic ways of symbolically bridging the human divide enough to coexist without eradicating differences or ritualistically sacrificing convenient scapegoats. War is a perversion of rhetorical expression, as Kenneth Burke has written, whereas peace can be privileged rhetorically through the principle of identification.[8] I can only hope the present probe of democracy's rhetorical configuration will prove sufficiently revealing to motivate further consideration of how the democratic idiom might be rehabilitated and accentuated for the added enhancement of human relations.

1
Republic of Fear

The American republic, so powerful its leaders have proclaimed it the world's indispensable nation, is prone to war because, paradoxically, it remains forever insecure no matter how many weapons it adds to its arsenal or how strong its economy or widespread its influence. The United States is a violent nation motivated by a tragic sense of fear, a country tyrannized by an exaggerated image of the danger endemic to domestic politics and international affairs. Yet, no people identify more closely than Americans with the quest for peace or profess themselves so devoutly the champion of global democracy. How is it, then, that such a powerful force for freedom should feel so vulnerable and compelled so often to break the peace it seeks?

Perhaps this question about the source of U.S. insecurity seems inappropriate. After all, is it accurate or fair to presume America is a violent nation? Whenever the United States has been forced to fight, has it not been a reluctant belligerent—a victim of aggression defending itself and others in a just cause? Is not peace the national norm and aspiration, not war?

Any responsible answer to such questions must acknowledge that the United States is both violent and peaceful in its conduct toward others and its aims for international order. The problem is not whether the country and its citizens want war or peace but how to minimize the inducement to violence. Regardless of their aspirations for peace, Americans have found themselves engaged in an endless quest for security punctuated by small and large wars throughout their history as a nation-state. Yearning for "perfect safety from foreign threats," they have remained for more than two centuries chronically alarmed "by even potential dangers," observe James Chace and Caleb Carr, and thus have responded with military force to "real and imag-